European journal of American studies

7-1 | 2012
Spring 2012

A Stiff Man-Child Walking: Derrida's Economy of Secrecy and Faulkner's "Barn Burning"

Michael Wainwright

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/9461
DOI: 10.4000/ejas.9461
ISSN: 1991-9336

Publisher
European Association for American Studies

Electronic reference
Michael Wainwright, « A Stiff Man-Child Walking: Derrida's Economy of Secrecy and Faulkner's "Barn Burning" », *European journal of American studies* [Online], 7-1 | 2012, document 1, Online since 09 December 2011, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/9461 ; DOI : 10.4000/ejas.9461

A Stiff Man-Child Walking: Derrida's Economy of Secrecy and Faulkner's "Barn Burning"

Michael Wainwright

Aye—no. No—aye, for I must be nothing,
Therefore no "no," for I resign to thee.
Now, mark me how I will undo myself.
William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, 4.1.200–02.
Not that it really does connect and yet not that it
really does not.
Gertrude Stein, "What is English Literature," 17.

1 In *Given Time* (1992), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) not only discusses the socioeconomic prescience of Charles Baudelaire's (1821–1867) "La fausse monnaie" (1869), but also anticipates his own thoughts in *On the Name* (1995) concerning the economy of secrecy. Retrospectively applying these economic contemplations to Baudelaire's prose poem—an exercise that Derrida does not undertake—both invests in the speculation engendered by "La fausse monnaie" and recommends that retrospective application to works with comparable *avant-la-lettre* tendencies, such as William Faulkner's (1897–1962) "Barn Burning" (1938). Both texts exhibit what Richard Rorty would call a poststructural "lubriciousness of the tangled" (126), but while a Derridean analysis of "La fausse monnaie" identifies the surrender of authorial control behind this complex indeterminacy, a similar examination emphasizes the failure of Faulknerians to recognize the same form of acquiescence in "Barn Burning." This inability undermines their laudable attempts to reveal the liberal politics of Faulkner's text. By examining Derrida's economy of secrecy, the following essay traces this critical failure, reappraises Faulkner's canonical short story, and redresses the interpretive balance in his favor.

2 The inviolable (or absolute) secret connotes an open rather than a hidden truth, explains Derrida in *On the Name*, and is therefore a paradoxical secret without secret. This obvious enigma fills the reader with desire:

> When all hypotheses are permitted, groundless and ad infinitum, about the meaning of a text, or the final intentions of an author, whose person is no more represented than nonrepresented by a character or by a narrator, by a poetic friend or fictional sentence, which detaches itself from its presumed source and thus remains *locked way* [*au secret*], when there is no longer even any sense in making decisions about some secret behind the surface of a textual manifestation (and it is this situation which I would call text or trace), when it is the call [*appel*] of this secret, ... which points back to the other or to something else, when it is this itself which keeps our passion aroused, and holds us to the other, then the secret impassions us. (29)

3 The absolute secret, like an unbreakable code, encourages endless hypotheses of impassioned interpretation. Literary worth is the open secret of absolute secrecy allied to and against which the revealable (or conditional) secret inscribes a marked contrast.

4 The relationship between what is inviolable and what is revealable has political ramifications for Derrida. Absolute secrecy arises from a reserve of unfathomable information, while conditional secrecy depends on a store of potential knowledge. Proprietorship of a revealable secret privileges its owner with "a phantasmatic power over others" (30) and this surplus potential can support interpersonal structures of an undemocratic nature. Inviolable secrecy, however, as its openness suggests, cannot fall foul of individual speculation, and this economic neutrality makes literature a democratic form of expression. "Through its aporetic structure," writes Alex Segal, absolute secrecy "displaces the use of (conditional) secrecy to attain power and is thereby tied to democracy" (190).

5 The aporia of the inviolable secret, which connotes the gap between the actually communicated and the intended but inexpressible communication, separates a writer from his work. An author cannot decrypt the absolute mysteries of his texts anymore than a reader of those texts can. Hence, as Nils Clausson observes,

> one of the consequences of poststructuralist theories of language and textuality has been to render problematical the commonsense idea that the author's intentions are a wholly reliable guide either to recovering the true meaning of a text, what the writer supposedly put there, or to correcting misinterpretations of a text, readings wrongly read into a text by errant or arrant readers. (109)

6 Breaking with the power of mastery, the inviolable secret is a form of literary gift, where gifting implies benevolence without return. Literature is an absolutely secret donation that thanks or another form of payment cannot recognize. Essential affinity between the aporetic essences of literature and the gift both identifies a literary work with and frees that work from its author. "Suppose that X, something or someone (a trace, a work, an institution, a child), bears your name, that is to say, your title," posits Derrida in *On the Name.* "The naïve rendering or common illusion [*fantasme courant*] is that you have given your name to X, thus all that returns to X, in a direct or indirect way, in a straight or oblique line, *returns* to you, as a profit for your narcissism. But," cautions Derrida,

> as you *are* not your name, nor your title, and given that, as the name or title, X does very well without you or your life, that is, without the place toward which something could *return*—just as that is the definition and the very possibility of every trace, and of all names and all titles, so your narcissism is frustrated a priori by that from which it profits or hopes to profit. Conversely, suppose that X did not

> want your name or your title; suppose that, for one reason or another, X broke free from it and chose himself another name, working a kind of repeated severance from the originary severance; then your narcissism, doubly injured, will find itself all the more enriched precisely on account of this: that which bears, has borne, will bear your name seems sufficiently free, powerful, creative, and autonomous to live alone and radically to do without you and your name. (12–13)

7 This converse supposition implies that "the ability to disappear *in your name*" is what "returns to your name." The absolute secrecy that frees a text from its authorial seal is at the same time the condition that augments the authorial self (or *auctoritas*). "In the two cases of this same divided passion," states Derrida, "it is impossible to dissociate the greatest profit and the greatest privation" (13).

8 Literature can survive without authorship—indeed, the unattributed work of logographers (or ghost writers) and the secrecy of anonymous authors (attributed to "anon") instantiate the durability of autonomous texts—but although the author can disappear into the inviolable privacy of literary ownership, the greater the autonomy of a text, the greater the possibility of intentionality behind that break from creative purpose. "For Derrida," as Segal stresses, "attention to authorial intention is a fundamental guardrail in the interpretation of texts" (191). The relationship opened between text and author by absolute secrecy, which allies the aporetic structures of literature and the gift, exhibits paradoxical degrees of authorial responsibility.

9 At one extreme, authorship is an irresponsible activity; the inviolable secrets of literature leave the field of expression open. In this regard, argues Derrida in *On the Name*, secrecy ties the destiny of literature "to a certain noncensure, to the space of democratic freedom (freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc.)" (28). From this perspective, as Derrida contends in "Before the Law" (1991), the literary domain "is not only that of an instituted *fiction* but also a *fictive institution* which in principle allows one to say everything." To say all is "to totalize by formalizing, but to say everything is also to break out of [*franchir*] prohibitions. To *affranchise oneself* [*s'affranchir*]—in every field where law can lay down the law" (36).

10 At the other extreme, authorship is a responsible activity; the propositional nature of a work is an authorial duty. Unscrupulous literature, whether perfunctorily penned or knowingly produced, can spread unethical or politically fallacious messages through the accepted protocols of semiotics and the traditional meanings of (Saussurean) signs. Thus, the Derridean focus on authorial intention, as Segal insists, "no more consigns literary interpretation to unbridled subjectivism and pure arbitrariness than it severs literature from ethical or political accountability" (206 n5).

11 Literature is at once the complete responsibility of an author and an appeal to the democratic spirit. Although usually a singular creation of an individual, which no one can gainsay, and therefore a secret matter of inviolable control, a literary creation nevertheless leaves the propositional intent of that absolute accountability open to public scrutiny. "Responsibility must be infinite. That's why I always feel not responsible enough" (48–49), admits Derrida in "following theory" (2003),

> because I'm finite and because there are an infinite number of others to whom or for whom or from whom I should be responsible. I'm always not responsible enough, and responsibility is infinite or it *is* not, but I cannot be responsible *to some extent* in the strict sense of "responsibility." (49)

12 That is why, he maintains, "I always feel guilty" (49). The double bind of textual accountability, as pursued by Derrida in "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism"

(1996), can thereby challenge the standard yet ironic concept of "politics and democracy as openness—where all are equal and where the public realm is open to all—which tends to deny, efface or prohibit the secret" (80).

13 After a typically elliptical introduction, as though the boundaries of *Given Time* testify to the related works that lie beyond its margins, Derrida approaches the textual accountability of Baudelaire's prose poem from its title. "The referential structure of a title," admits Derrida, "is always very tricky" (84)—and "La fausse monnaie" is no exception. On the one hand, this heading refers to the phenomenon of counterfeit money, "a sign without value, if not without meaning." On the other hand, this heading refers to the subsequent narrative, "this text *here*, this story of counterfeit money" (85). "The title of a text," observes Segal, "would seem to be connected to its demarcation, its identity. Yet Derrida argues that in so far as counterfeit money is illegal, the title of 'Counterfeit Money' is without title" (194). Ordinarily, an introductory heading both identifies and begins a text, but according to Derrida's thesis in "Before the Law," "the power and import of a title have an essential relationship with something like the law" (188–89). The illegality of forged currency means that "La fausse monnaie" is without a valid heading. "Barn Burning," as the title of Faulkner's short story, which refers at once to a transgressive activity and the narrative that follows, engenders a similar dehiscence. A reference to an illegal act, and so courting a break with lawful power, "Barn Burning" is another title without title.[1]

14 Opening from its titular framework to reveal two friends emerging from another frame, the door of a tobacconist's shop in Paris, Baudelaire's prose poem immediately arouses speculation with the behavior of the narrator's colleague. "As we were walking from a tobacconist's," recalls the narrator, "my friend carefully sorted out his change: into the left pocket of his waistcoat he slipped the small gold coins, into the right, the small silver coins; into the left pocket of his breeches, a mass of large copper coins, and finally, into the right, a two-franc silver piece he had examined with noticeable attention" (48–49).[2] The two men shortly encountered "a beggar who tremblingly held out his hat to us." Each man handed over a coin. "My friend's offering," concedes the narrator, "was much larger than mine." Embarrassed, he pointed out this discrepancy to his colleague, but his friend dismissed the issue nonchalantly: "it was the counterfeit coin" (49). This rejoinder about the silver piece that had caught his colleague's attention only minutes earlier perplexes the narrator. Moreover, as Derrida explains of another structuring device, "the narration is framed in such a way that, like the narrator, we are the friend's debtors, but to the paradoxical extent that we live on the very credit *we are obliged to extend to him*. Whether or not we take him at his word," continues Derrida, "we have only his word. We are at once his debtor and his creditor" (151). The reader partakes of the narrator's viewpoint and must ask, as the narrator does, why his colleague made his admission about the silver coin. Credence, as a matter of speculation, and credit, as the issue of acclaim, are suddenly at stake.

15 "Here," argues Derrida in *Given Time*, "we can speculate and extend credit: at least three hypotheses, but in fact a series of innumerable prognostications" (149), arise. According to one premise, as the narrator first believes, his colleague has lied "to justify his own largesse" in donating an amount that "might serve as the germ for several day's capital, in the hands of a poor, small-time speculator" (49). Putting this reasoning another way, his friend is not only modest, but is also sensitive to the narrator's self-reflective qualms concerning his own meanness. Into the narrator's "miserable brain" (49), however, comes

another thought. Did his colleague merely wish to enjoy the possible consequences of giving a mendicant counterfeit money? The man might not recognize the coin as a forgery and be arrested when trying to spend it. Alternatively, the next recipient of the coin might not recognize it as counterfeit and the beggar might prosper. Just as the narrator reaches this seemingly unjust conclusion about his friend's motive, his colleague "brusquely breaks into his reverie," repeating the narrator's contention. "Yes, you are right," he confesses, "there is no sweeter pleasure than surprising a man by giving him more than his hopes allowed" (50). In the light of this admittance, the colleague's declaration signifies what Derrida calls "a surplus of naïve triumph and boastfulness close to cynicism"; as a corollary, the narrator's friend has gratuitously accredited himself through secretive reckoning, which for Derrida amounts to this:

> So, you recognize how good I am at treating myself to the greatest pleasure; well, I am even sharper than that: I bought myself the greatest pleasure at the lowest price: you give me credit, but I speculate even better than you think. (149)

16 Crucially, these two conjectures, the first concerning self-effacing altruism, the second concerning self-interested arrogance, exhibit a relationship that classical dialectics cannot resolve; "on the contrary," as Derrida expounds, "they superimpose themselves on each other, they accumulate like a capital of true or (perhaps) counterfeit money that may produce interest; they overdetermine each other in the ellipsis of the declaration." Each conjecture "is justifiable and each has a certain right to be credited, accredited. This," he concludes, "is the phenomenon without phenomenality of counterfeit money" (149)—and the third of Derrida's immediate prognostications.

17 In "Barn Burning," the unnamed, heterodiegetic, and inviolably secret narrator begins his tale by introducing both "the Justice of the Peace's court" and the seemingly inconsistent detail that this room "smelled of cheese" (3). Due lawful process has in fact seconded a general store. Colonel Sartoris (or Sarty) Snopes's growing awareness of his surroundings, his father's (Abner's) appearance before the justice, and the notion that Sarty is both young enough and too young to be the bearer of an important conditional secret—privileged knowledge that his father and elder brother might also hold—slowly announce themselves as significant narratological details within this peculiar ambiance of law, law enforcement, and the economics of exchange.

18 Mr. Harris, a local landowner, recounts the events concerning his tenant Abner Snopes that culminated in these proceedings. Snopes's "hog got into my corn," he tells the court. "I caught it up and sent it back to him. He had no fence that would hold it. I told him so, warned him. The next time I put the hog in my pen. When he came to get it," recounts Harris, "I gave him enough wire to patch up his pen. The next time I put the hog up and kept it. I rode down to his house and saw the wire I gave him still rolled on to the spool in his yard," maintains Snopes's landlord. "I told him he could have the hog when he paid me a dollar pound fee (3–4). That evening, continues Harris, "a strange nigger" (4) came to collect Snopes's pig. Having paid the fine, and with the pig in tow, this intermediary then delivered a message: "He say to tell you wood and hay kin burn." Rather at a loss, Harris asked the African American to repeat himself, but the tenor of the message remained the same. "That whut he say to tell you," the man replied. "Wood and hay kin burn" (4).

19 The transitive relations that marked this communication—the human links in its chain—simultaneously indict Abner for and absolve him from responsibility for the message. Harris being the origin of this evidence, rather than the unknown messenger, further

weakens its legitimacy before the law. The justice's repeated call to produce the African American in person testifies to this flaw in Harris's suit against Snopes. Be that as it may, attests Harris, "that night my barn burned. I got the stock out but I lost the barn" (4).

20 From Harris's point of view, Snopes has slaked his annoyance through the impropriety of barn burning, an act of dissent he hopes to cloud in conditional secrecy, but without further personal evidence to offer the court, Harris must produce another witness. He knows Snopes's eldest son will be as secretive before the court as his father is, so he calls Sarty to testify. Harris hopes Sarty is still innocent enough to reveal his father's conditional secret in the name of truth. Sarty, however, says nothing other than whispering his full name. Faced with a silent minor in his court, the justice asks Harris incredulously, "Do you want me to question this boy?" Harris's conflict of responsibilities to the law, which he recognizes with a "violently, explosively" stated acquiescence to the justice's implicit expectation, falls in Abner Snopes's favor. With no independent witness, the justice dismisses the case against Snopes, but nevertheless orders him to take his "wagon and get out of this country before dark" (5). The expectancy induced by the title of Faulkner's story is maintained and the reader is free to speculate whether "Barn Burning" will reveal the currently inviolable secret about the cause of Harris's fire, which (in the case of a criminal act) the perpetrator would hold in conditional secrecy.

21 Thus, as with "La fausse monnaie," a supposedly revealable secret empowers its holder in "Barn Burning." Furthermore, as with Baudelaire's prose poem, the narrative frame leaves Faulkner's reader paradoxically indebted to the African-American messenger. At once this man's debtor and creditor, was Harris (and, in turn, the reader) to have taken the relayed message as a warning or as an expression of inevitable intention? The reserves of deconstructive energy, the secretive traces interwoven throughout the surface textuality of "Barn Burning," not only pose this question, but also imply that, whatever the answer, the message from this stranger is a curious form of gift.

22 The intelligent and contradictory readings and writings unraveled and spun by Faulknerians in response to "Barn Burning" acknowledge and draw on this paradoxical resource with the hypothesis that Abner is unlikely to send an African American on Snopes business and the inferable consequences of this improbable event regarding Abner's racial lineage. The work of John Duvall provides an apposite entrance into these discussions. "As [Richard] Godden has pointed out," and as Duvall appreciates, "everything about Abner is associated with blackness—his black hat and frockcoat, but most particularly his relationship with fire. Faulkner's repeated use of the term 'niggard' to describe the fire that Abner burns for his family," notes Duvall, "serves as wordplay that both points toward, even as its etymological difference deflects attention away from, 'nigger'" (115). Duvall, however, takes Godden's argument further. "I wish to suggest that the story's 'strange nigger,'" he writes,

> is actually in the store where the hearing takes place and is the very figure of the man in black, Abner Snopes. Since almost the only person Abner would trust with a dollar is himself (or closekin), it seems plausible that Abner (or perhaps his eldest son) blackened up in order to collect his hog and deliver his warning in person without being recognized. (115)

23 Duvall immediately acknowledges "one logical and one textual" weakness to his proposal of a blacked up Abner. "An immediate objection," he admits, "might be that surely Harris would recognize such a ruse and would be immediately able to distinguish an artificial from an authentic black." Duvall paraphrases the relevant section of Eric Lott's *Love and*

Theft (1993) to answer this point. "Audiences of minstrel shows in the nineteenth century often were completely fooled by the racial masquerade," states Duvall, "and assumed that the white performers who entertained them were actually black" (115). The text-based objection submits that Sarty's plea when Abner intends to burn his next employer's barn —"'Ain't you going to even send a nigger?' he cried. 'At least you sent a nigger before'" (21)—undercuts Duvall's conjecture. In response, Duvall contends that "the detail of the black man carrying a warning is one Sarty more likely learned about from Harris's testimony" (115–16). Abner's youngest boy "effectively knows no more about the identity of the 'strange' black than the reader"; his question "in no way proves that he had first-hand knowledge about his father actually sending a racially black messenger to Harris" (116).

24 Nonetheless, and perhaps because the cultural mediation of race is his focus, Duvall misses the logical and textual objection to his thesis, the obvious reason why a blackface Abner would not have fooled Harris: that something other, that sign divorced from race, that Achilles' heel in terms of mimicry; namely, Abner's "stiff and ruthless limp" (8). That his secretive eldest son—presumably the Flem of Faulkner's subsequent fiction, but on the evidence of "Barn Burning" the absolutely secret scion who goes unnamed, while the younger Colonel Sartoris causes consternation among Mississippians aware of the Civil War provenance associated with this name—is the only candidate for the unknown African American other than an unknown African American. The absolute secrecy of appellative anonymity qualifies Abner's firstborn son for the role of Duvall's messenger.

25 Even so, from the perspective of deconstructive potential within the text, whether the messenger is Abner or not is less relevant than both Godden and Duvall's laudatory efforts in identifying the language and metaphors that stand in almost secret contrast to the ostensible meaning of "Barn Burning." These critical exertions do not allow the explicit, central, and dominant implications of the text to drive their critical readings and writings. In racial terms, according to the spectrum of responses from this scholarship, Abner might be white, black passing (intentionally or not) for white, white artificially made up to be black, or black passing (intentionally or not) for white artificially passing for black. The preeminent inference from these interpretations evinces Faulkner's gift of ethical potential in "Barn Burning." Cynics might rate this contention as academically gratuitous but, as Derrida argues in"following theory," there is no law restricting the limits of carefully considered criticism. "There are ethics," he avers, "precisely because there is this contradiction, because there *is* no rule" (31) to reading literature. That Faulkner's short story subversively blurs the sociopolitical boundaries, distinctions that it purportedly and simultaneously clearly supports, promotes "Barn Burning" as a worthy ethical resource. Faulkner's propositional intention is the firm historicization of this short story within the ostensible setting of the 1890s but as implicitly questioned from the late 1930s.

26 Literary critics have often underestimated historically as well as politically this type of chronotopic superimposition. The debate concerning countercultural hope in the face of reactionary cultural standards remains a priority for postcolonial literary criticism and Derridean musings about secrecy and literature can positively contribute to this aspect of Faulkner studies; for, as Clausson insists, "if we are going to follow Fredric Jameson's injunction to 'always historicize,'" then "we must first, as [Herman] Rapaport has insisted, read 'with the kind of dedication to reading that has not been in evidence in the history that could been called the eclipsing of deconstruction'" (125). Clausson shares

with Rapaport, whose careful reassessment of poststructuralism in *The Theory Mess* (2001) is Clausson's principal corroborative resource, a practical goal. According to Clausson, their common aim concerns

> what deconstruction can offer to the *practice* of literary studies at a juncture when the turn to history and culture, in the varied forms of new historicism, Marxism, and cultural, gender, post-colonial, ethnic, race and queer studies, has had the unfortunate (and not always unintended) consequence of framing the practice of literary studies as an either/or proposition. (108)

27 This frame is "*either* a cultural/historical criticism of political engagement with issues of race, gender and ethnicity, *or* an apolitical retreat into hermetic formalism, with a focus on the text itself and on aesthetics" (108). Deconstruction does not denote a "negative demonstration that the binaries 'cancel' out one another in a bottomless pit of meanings endlessly deferred," stresses Clausson, because "the next step is to ask: Why *these* particular binaries? and Why *these* binaries in *this* particular historical context?" (124). This approach heeds Derrida's advice in *Writing and Difference* (1967): once the limit of a binary opposition "makes itself felt," the critic must "question systematically and rigorously the history" (358) of the signs and concepts constituting that delimitation.

28 If sterilization does not result from this poststructuralist "action" (358)—if, in other words, the impasse inherent to texts constructed from blatant oppositions, such as in the racist or misogynistic tract, does not materialize—then these binaries must be thoroughly analyzed. These two steps, as followed by Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* (1992) and Susan Gubar in *Racechanges* (1997), provide more contemplative grist to Duvall's interpretation of "Barn Burning." Specifically, Morrison's work on figurative blackness and Africanist presence in the canonical literature of white writers and Gubar's study of racial metamorphosis in art inform Duvall's thoughts about artificially passing for black. Yet, while these critical sources show how "artists from widely divergent ideological backgrounds...meditate on racial privilege and privation as well as on the disequilibrium of race," Duvall does "see limitations to their projects inasmuch as they always identify white writers' engagements with blackness as a problem or a failure." On the one hand, "Morrison typically identifies a failure in aesthetic design" (106). On the other hand, Gubar judges "every white appropriation of blackness" to "be a net loss in the search for a more ethical understanding of race" (106–07). Duvall sympathizes with each of these views, but believes "they may be only half right, because there is also something potentially productive in such appropriations." Crucially, as Faulkner's literature so often connotes, "there are in-between characters" (107), whom the endeavors of Morrison and Gubar necessarily leave hidden in the secretive Faulknerian shadows. Particularly appropriate to Duvall's cause are Faulkner's "Caucasians who instantiate blackness in ways that complicate the Southern racial binarism. These presumptively white characters come to embody black culture," he argues, "where 'black' is not exactly race any longer, but (because it is the South) it is not exactly not race either" (107).

29 Indeed, Duvall implicitly identifies the first two steps of Derridean problematization from *Writing and Difference* in Gubar's thesis, but implicitly censures her conclusions as the opening of other binaries (or dialectical opposites) that provide the literary critic with little exploratory scope. "Despite Gubar's attempts to work dialectically," regrets Duvall, "in the last instance her recurring conclusion is that black impersonations of whiteness are, if not always politically useful, at least justifiable, while white impersonations of blackness are inevitably gestures of bad faith" (107 n1). In contrast, Duvall wishes to show how "Faulkner's use of figurative blackness is literally productive because it allows him a

way to map imbricated relations between one form of otherness (racial) and other forms of otherness (gender/sexuality and class). More importantly," maintains Duvall, "it allows Faulkner's readers to see that, whatever the residual racism of William Faulkner, his narratives negotiate racial struggle even when race seems absent from their field of vision; these narratives are, in other words," he concludes, "racialized in a way that enables a critical purchase on whiteness" (108).

30 Presence through visual absence, of course, accords with the theme of secrecy, and Duvall recognizes the intersections of minoritarian otherness with majoritarian concepts, but Derridean thoughts about the secrets of literature ultimately indict Duvall's criticism because he unintentionally and tacitly accuses Faulkner of authorial timidity. "Barn Burning," implies Duvall, feints toward but draws back from the relinquishment of *auctoritas*, a retreat with which Derrida does not charge "La fausse monnaie." Despite the less explicit manner in which Faulkner approaches the theme of secrecy, Duvall understands "Barn Burning" to direct the reader to Faulkner's knowing insertion of an absolute secret. Unlike this short story, "La fausse monnaie" is a figuration of secrecy that Baudelaire allows to escape from authorial control. In question, then, is the absolute secrecy concerning a conditional secret. For Duvall, the mediation that interposes between Abner Snopes and Harris—who never directly and explicitly exchange words in "Barn Burning"—is the *deferral* of Snopes's communication to a *different* or "other" voice so strange that Harris requires and demands the repetition of that message. This *différance*, which amounts to an unnecessary supplement to Harris's repeated testimony during the courtroom hearing, points to authorial intervention. "Too much of what is not stated about this individual who is identified as African American doesn't quite hold together," thinks Duvall. "Is he a stranger or, as the locution seems to suggest, odd or unusual?" (115). Within the context of "Barn Burning," Duvall implicitly suggests, the word "strange" gratuitously exhibits the twofold proprietorship (or split ownership) that Mikhail Bakhtin attributes to all words prior to individual appropriation. "The word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language," argues Bakhtin in "Discourse in the Novel" (1934), "but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (294).

31 Duvall's interpretation of this strange locution, of this unusual style of speaking, must be in part a syntactical response, a critical reaction that places not the justice of the peace but Faulkner as the other proprietor of Harris's utterance. As in poetry, syntax can, through repetition or the subtle modulations of reiteration, act as a signifying element in prose, and the second instance of Harris's description of the African-American messenger does display a reiterative alteration. "He was a strange nigger, I tell you," expostulates Harris. The repetition of the opening phrase is a syntactical manipulation that emphasizes the importance of the designation "strange," while the addition of the post-caesura clause turns Harris's original declaration into a rhythmically evocative one. To use musical notation, a three-four time signature breaks Harris's reiterated statement into three bars, each of which contains three crochets: "He was a / strange nig-ger / I tell you." The attendant beat creates an association between the words "He," "strange," and "I." This correspondence imposes a strangeness not only to "He," but also to "I." Working together, Harris's declarations bespeak a syntactical manipulation to Duvall that at once highlights the adjective "strange" and implies that the marshalling of the "He"-"strange"-"I" correspondence comes from an individual other than Harris. With

synonyms for "strange" contesting for explicit usage and inscribing that word with ambiguity, adjectival significance within a syntactical context presumably adds to that multifariously singular content to suggest a propositional attitude on Faulkner's behalf. "Strange" is a matter of authorial responsibility, a propositional intervention, and the strange "I" is Faulkner. The author, implies Duvall, resorts to a gratuitous gift. Faulkner, as if unwilling to forsake complete responsibility for the secret without secret of absolute secrecy; cannot help but deny some irresponsibility toward authorship.

32 A further extrapolation from this interpretation of Duvall's criticism draws on the Derridean understanding that if an inviolable secret is to affirmatively displace a conditional secret, then that dislocation needs no advertisement. In Duvall's reading of "Barn Burning," the authorial voice interposes the "strange" epithet into Harris's testimony and this intervention (or revelatory addition) deflates the impassionate effect of Faulkner's text. Duvall certainly does not intend this conclusion. Worse, the absolute secret that undermines the use of the word "nigger" by Harris, Abner, and Sarty—an essentially radical secrecy in the face of unreconstructed views—loses its displacement value with regard to the conditional secret that empowers Abner's phantasmatic and contradictory power to level (however briefly) the hierarchical construct of landlord over tenant.

33 Recognition of the deconstructive potential within "Barn Burning" for which the author has intentional responsibility, however, should acknowledge Faulkner's concomitant disavowal of *auctoritas*. This is where Duvall falls short. Reading Faulkner's fiction, texts that pregnantly evince poststructural tendencies *avant la lettre*, encourages critical projection beyond and interpolation between the inculcated terms and oppositions of American culture. In keeping with the aporetic structure of the absolute secret, Abner is somewhat of the spectral interstice, as Godden's earlier cited argument should suggest. The Abner who makes "a small fire, neat, niggard almost" (7), is almost a "nigger," but that he learnt this fieldcraft during the American Civil War when "in the woods hiding from all men, blue or gray" (7), simultaneously places Abner between polar opposites. Color and the grayscale resulting from a mixture of black and white signify these poles. This interstitial existence is an implicit strangeness—a different kind of in-between than Godden and Duvall contemplate. That Abner is a "bloodless" (8) corpse, or "stiff" (4, 5, 8, etc.), who is practically always on the move further suggests that Snopes haunts this intermediate space. Moreover, he can inhabit both extremes of the ontological spectrum at the same time, as his behavior testifies. Abner is stubborn to his superiors, yet they deem him a flexible and willing extractor of revenge and avoider of the law. Attire that is "at once formal and burlesque" (20) is characteristic of these opposites, as is the peculiar double nature of his physical actions. In leaving Harris's land after the hearing, Abner mounts his wagon, sits down, and then strikes his mules "two *savage* blows with the peeled willow, but *withoutheat*." This action "was not even sadistic; it was exactly that same quality which in later years would cause his descendants to over-run the engine before putting a motor car into motion, *striking and reining back in the same movement*" (6; emphasis added).

34 Abner's presence, which always seems to carry two or more interpretations, compounds his deconstructive reserve, so that he is both a familiar type (the *Heimliche*) to the communities through which he passes and an unwelcome visitation (the *Unheimliche*). Abner is a nonwarrantor whose repeated moves from landlord to landlord facilitate and symbolize the economic cycle of exchange, but an unusually rebellious one—Karl Marx

dismissed the political potential or usefulness of the lumpenproletariat—who invariably reappears in the southern economy after critically devaluing his use-value to one landlord as a persistently irritating *revenant* within the sociopolitical environment he necessarily but unwillingly helps to maintain. At the heart of Abner's figuration, then, is a dialogic that constructs and haunts his cultural surroundings with an otherness beyond the intention of double inscription. Any landlord is a host—Abner's necessary but despised proprietor—while Abner is that landlord's accepted guest upon his farmland—a tenant who always moves before authority can pin him down for malfeasance. These visitation rights augment Abner's (non)authorial self.

35 Duvall's juxtaposition of Faulkner's "Barn Burning" with Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (1940) certainly "underscore[s] the economic slavery experienced alike by black and white sharecroppers" (113). Nevertheless, while Abner suffers in the master-slave dialectic, he is a radically ambiguous participant in these relations, as Duvall's own language unconsciously (and therefore secretly) adumbrates. "The class lesson that Abner Snopes tries to teach his son Sarty," professes Duvall, "is *uncannily* similar to the one Dave begins to learn" (114 [emphasis added]) in Wright's short story. Abner, as Sarty acknowledges, is substantially insubstantial: he exhibits "that impervious quality of something cut ruthlessly from tin, depthless, as though, sidewise to the sun, it would cast no shadow" (10); his presence is that of a "depthless" and "harsh silhouette" (14); he is both without depth and of a depth without bottom. From a capitalist perspective, Abner Snopes is one of the insubstantial men who comprise the lumpenproletariat, yet he continually speculates on speculation in a manner that costs his warrantors their ease.[3]

36 The narrator of Baudelaire's prose poem, notes Derrida, "speculates on what can happen to capital in a capital during the age of money, more precisely, in the age of value as monetary sign" (124). In Faulkner's short story, the threat of barn burning intervenes between the capitalist speculation of a series of warrantors and the actions of a nonwarrantor supposedly precluded from this kind of speculation. In fact, fire, or going up in smoke, is crucial to both tales. The events of "La fausse monnaie" arise from the two men leaving a tobacconist's shop, with the narrator's colleague presumably having bought some tobacco, and possibly having received a counterfeit coin in the exchange. Not bothering to complain to the shopkeeper betrays a tendency toward conspicuous consumption in keeping with what Derrida calls the "pure and luxurious" (Given 107) gratification afforded by cigarette, cigar, and pipe smoking. Each act is an appropriation of surplus-value. In contrast, Abner Snopes does not smoke, nor does any member of his family. This non-habit prefigures Flem Snopes's behavior in The *Hamlet* (1940). "Have a cigar," landowner Will Varner tells his dirt farmer one day. "I don't use them" (750), Flem replies. "'Just chew, hah?' Varner said," in reference to Flem's habitually masticating jaws. "I chew up a nickel now and then until the suption is out of it," states Flem. "But I aint never lit a match to one yet" (751).

37 If the speculative thoughts engendered by "La fausse monnaie," as Derrida argues in *Given Time*, "are a guide back to" an "archaic originarity, which we have left behind or allowed to become perverted, in a non-Marxist socialism" (66), then Baudelaire's anti-mercantilism finds an American echo in Faulkner's retrospective anti-capitalism. Whereas "La fausse monnaie" concerns the urban economy of bourgeois and mendicant, "Barn Burning" concerns the rural economy of warrantor and nonwarrantor. Faulkner's tale pursues this version of non-Marxist socialism more concertedly than Baudelaire's

short prose poem can. The surplus generated when the labor of a dirt farmer in the American south exceeds subsistence is ceded to the economic upper class. Hence, from one landowner to the next, Abner Snopes interprets the barn as a symbol of proprietary excess. A valuable commodity in its own right, the barn stores the surplus crop from Abner's rented land and the other material possessions (or "stock") of his economic master. No wonder his threatened response is to reduce that excess to ashes. Barn burning by a nonwarrantor is a form of conspicuous consumption from a socioeconomic class of people whose societal status should ensure their preclusion from genuine indulgence. Arson foretells of Abner's supposed pleasure in taking from his landlord more than a nonwarrantor's rights allow. His assumed crimes are interpreted by warrantors as illegal expropriations (rather than reductive reappropriations) of surplus-value. Ostensibly, Abner is a white dirt farmer who rents the land he works, but implicitly he is a barnburner, the master of a conditional secret that trails behind him as a reserve on which Abner draws only if slighted by his landlord.

38 The economies of secrecy and capital come markedly to the fore in relation to Snopes's next employer, who from Abner's viewpoint "aims to begin tomorrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months" (9), when he visits Major de Spain's mansion for the first time. "Watching him," Sarty remarks "the absolutely undeviating course which his father held," and cannot help but see "the stiff foot come squarely down in a pile of fresh droppings where a horse had stood in the drive and which his father could have avoided by a simple change of stride" (10). Despite a warrantee in the form of Major de Spain's servant trying to bar the nonwarrantor's entrance to the mansion, Abner tramps in through the major's front door. Sarty notices "the prints of the stiff foot on the door jamb" and watches "them appear on the pale rug behind the machinelike deliberation of the foot" (11). They leave a track representative of a mutual antagonism that not only associates Abner's privation with the major's conspicuous consumption, but also prefigures the two men's relationship. Abner only halts when his presence calls forth the major's wife. "Wiping cake or biscuit dough from her hands with a towel"(12)—a sign of comestible delights to come that Snopes "domesticity" can never have witnessed—she stares "at the tracks on the blond rug with an expression of incredulous amazement" (12). The way in which Abner disrupts Major de Spain's mansion with this simple, curt, uncompromising visit, the briefest of sojourns in which the "formal and burlesque" (20) state of his broadcloth coat hovers with the "friction-glazed greenish cast of the bodies of old house flies" (11) over the horse muck on the French carpet, is that of an annoying insect that enters and leaves a property according to its own precepts. Snopes's stiff leg seems either "to bear (or transmit) twice the weight which the body compassed" (11). Abner's contradictory impression is at once a burden to himself and an implicit message to his new landlord.

39 Abner plans to be both as obvious (or open) and unfathomable (or secretive) for Major de Spain as he has been for the major's predecessors. His unaccountable visit to the mansion is soon conflated in the eyes of Harris's successor by the Snopeses' successfully unsuccessful effort to clean the dung-soiled rug. This task, which is communicated to Abner by a "Negro youth" (12) he does not know—and therefore in an inversion of the message supposedly transmitted to Harris about barn burning—leaves the carpet in a different yet similarly damaged state. The original tracks "were gone," but "where they had been were now long, water-cloudy scoriations resembling the sporadic course of a lilliputian mowing machine" (14). In replacing the offensively dark with the offensively

pale, these new marks follow the course of the old ones. Abner's presence, which will "not to be dwarfed by anything" (11), leaves an incongruously Lilliputian but potentially ineradicable trace on the major's conspicuous possession, which came "all the way from France" (13) at the cost of "a hundred dollars" (18). The marks on this rug, of course, do not redress the balance between the tenant and his landlord, as the "pallets" (14) that separate the sleeping Snopeses from the dirt floor of their rented ex-slave cabin attest; rather, they would seem to presage the economic retribution of another burning barn.

40 That Abner's presence succeeds in shaking hierarchical structures is again apparent after the damaging restoration of the rug. The major attempts to fine his tenant "twenty bushels of corn" (16) against his crop for the botched cleaning. Gender reversal speaks for Abner's effect on this occasion: Major de Spain makes his demand in the "trembling" "shaking" of a "woman" (15). Abner not deigning to reply through face-to-face communication, but unwilling to produce a greater surplus for his landlord than his original contract stipulates, sues the major for overstepping his lawful bounds. Abner may be a nonwarrantor, with all the disadvantages of that class, yet successive landlords fail to crush his self-possession. With a wagon his only material object of exchange-value, the practically impecunious Abner rates his ontological right to master himself as invaluable. His self-assessment mirrors that of his supposed superiors, as the inverted play of frames in "Barn Burning" avers. For, after his initial visit to Major de Spain's house, Abner rematerializes against the background of the cabin where his family are meant to live. Sarty's "father appeared at the door" of the shack, "framed against that shabbiness, as he had been against that other bland perfection, impervious to either" (13). Although a fleetingly insubstantial shadow of the major, whom Sarty will later see as "the white man...emerging from a white door down the hall" (23) of his mansion, Abner is a substantial presence to his youngest son.

41 Both of no depth and without depth, the only substantial threat to Abner, the only manner of his substantiation as a barnburner, lies with Sarty. Abner, who will not communicate with his masters through his own voice, might be betrayed by the voice of his youngest son. "You were fixing to tell them," he accuses Sarty after the Harris hearing. "You would have told him" (8). Torn between his feeling that Abner's complainants "wanted only truth, justice" (8), and "the old grief of blood" (3), Sarty's silence before the justice at once safeguards Abner's conditional secret—leaving Abner free to haunt prospective masters as a potential arsonist—and defends the boy against an act of perjury. The secret conjectured about the Snopes patriarch remains hidden and, despite physical chastisement for what Abner deemed to be wavering loyalty, Sarty affords himself the hope that "*forever*" his father is "*done satisfied now*" (6).

42 Abner, though, experiences no such relief; in fact, Sarty is a growing concern—both a boy who will be a financial asset to his father and a youth who will cause his father anxiety. Filial disloyalty is an aspect to the Oedipal dilemma that Abner has negotiated successfully with his eldest son, whose reticence reassures his father, but which remains an unresolved issue with his youngest boy. The poststructuralist interpretation of the Oedipus complex particularly heeds the role of language in this situation. "Pay systematic attention," counsels Derrida in *Dissemination* (1972), "to the permanence of a Platonic schema that assigns the origin and power of speech, precisely of *logos*, to the paternal position. Not that this happens especially and exclusively in Plato. Everyone knows this or can easily imagine it," he contends. "But the fact that 'Platonism,' which sets up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality, should not escape the generality of

this structural constraint, and even illustrates it with incomparable subtlety and force," he asserts, "stands out as all the more significant" (76). Thus, in an anachronism, "the 'speaking subject' is the *father* of his speech. And one would quickly realize that this is no metaphor, at least not in the sense of any common, conventional effect of rhetoric. *Logos* is a son, then," reasons Derrida, "a son that would be destroyed by his very presence without the present *attendance* of his father. His father who answers. His father who speaks for him" (77).

43 Abner's silence toward his warrantors, which says everything about the power of dirt farmers disenfranchised from the land on which they live and work, speaks for Sarty at the two justice hearings. On each occasion, Sarty fails in his struggle to overcome his father's presence and so fails to father his own *logos*. Rent bidirectionally when called to testify, the boy's stream of consciousness, unmediated by Faulkner's absolutely secret narrator, and in silent agreement with but in simultaneous repudiation of his father, also pulls in two directions. With ellipses doubly enhancing the sense of interiority, Sarty's secret thoughts at the Harris hearing exemplify this repeated conundrum: "(*our enemy* he thought in that despair; *ourn! mine and hisn both! He's my father!*)" (3) is a statement that can point to Abner as much as to Harris. This strange doubleness toward the father characterizes the inheritance of an ironically paternal trait that appears to arise from the secret machinations of biological inheritance: for, alongside Abner's two sons stand sisters who are "twins" (23).

44 Certainly, as Noel Polk argues, Sarty's conundrum "crystallizes and encapsulates the dilemma of nearly all children in Faulkner," descendents who "get caught in the crossfire between contending but mutually reifying structures that demand their obedience" (28). Polk identifies these cultural manifestations as the courthouse and the mansion. With particular reference to "Barn Burning," these "political and economic bastions of the symbolic order," believes Polk, "are much more likely to conspire to maintain his father in his familial place of localized dominance over Sarty than to free him from them" (27); as a corollary, "for Sarty and his family, Ab *is* the law" (28), and Abner's progeny inhabit what Polk calls Faulkner's "dark house"—property within the property of their parents, such children "have no commerce with the courthouse except as it stands beyond and validates the power of the father" (29).

45 Notwithstanding the coherence of Polk's thesis, his sense of "contending" does not fully acknowledge the ambiguous lure of affranchisement, the Derridean understanding from *On the Name* of breaking free of prohibitions, that threatens to tear Sarty apart rather than meld him into a congruous whole. Having taken Major de Spain to court, and with the justice's decision to lower the major's compensation, Sarty hopes in conditional secrecy for an "economic" cessation of his father's antagonistic nature. "*Maybe it will all* add up and balance *and vanish*," he thinks, "*—corn, rug, fire; the terror and grief, the being pulled two ways like between two teams of horses—gone, done with for ever and ever*" (17; emphasis added). Sarty has lived his short life in perpetual motion with his family constantly moving toward their next, unnamed, and therefore never fully localized location; he is a communal stranger; he is an impersonal working component in the economic cycle of exchange. The ruling somewhat in Abner's favor might end this itinerancy, muses Sarty. He even allows himself the joy of a finite future infinitely construed—that unending satisfaction he had wished on his father after the Harris trial—but events soon abort his youthful thoughts of settlement (in all its forms).

46 Unsatisfied by the judgment against Major de Spain, unreconstructed in his attitude toward warrantors, Abner risks no gratuitous communication before taking his revenge. He even threatens to tie Sarty up, as a safeguard against the revelation of his conditional secret concerning the razing of the major's barn, if his wife will not keep the boy within their cabin. She does as ordered, but with his hopes for a settled life disrupted, Sarty escapes his mother, takes on the role of messenger of "truth, justice" (8), and freely delivers (or gifts) a warning to the major. In responding to this message, Major de Spain becomes as depthless as the figure Abner Snopes projects, the landlord's "furious silhouette" standing out against "the tranquil early summer night sky" (24). That the outcome to Sarty's message is another absolute secret that glimmers almost indistinguishably on the surface of Faulkner's text therefore comes as little surprise. Three gunshots ring out. The boy's cry of "Pap! Pap!" (14), followed by his past tense assertion that his father "was brave" (14), possibly point to the major's deadly uncovering of Abner's conditional secret. Maybe the major kills Abner and/or Abner's eldest son, but the literary critic, no matter how scrupulous in his analysis, will never know for sure. Hence, whichever reading suits the scholar, the profound reserve of deconstructive energy in "Barn Burning" impassions Faulkner's text until its narratological end.

47 The stiffness of Abner, the man with "the cold, dead voice" (21), a dead man limping (—and is that a lie maintained throughout, a conditional secret not even suspected by the narrator who relates how "a Confederate provost's man's musket ball had taken" Abner "in the heel on a stolen horse thirty years ago" [5]?—) is doubled by the "little stiff" that the "cold" but "walking" (25) Sarty now manifests.[4] The reader can speculate whether Sarty Snopes, as a direct descendant of Abner is racially white, black passing (intentionally or not) for white, white artificially black, or black passing (intentionally or not) for white artificially passing for black, or whether Sarty's conscience betrays his mother's infidelity, but beyond such considerations "Barn Burning" closes with a young, and therefore still maturing, character headed toward an ever widening horizon.

48 Sarty Snopes does not figure messianicism as Joe Christmas does in Faulkner's earlier *Light in August* (1932), but evokes the messianic with his steps toward a never to be realized messianicity. Thanks to its inviolable secrecy, argues Derrida, literature immanently conjures the imminently democratic; this prospect of the ever-presently democratic from present democracy is the messianic proper. This form of messianism is, as Derrida's essay on "Faith and Knowledge" elucidates, "without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration" (17). The messianism of theology, what Derrida calls "messianicism," looks forward to a messiah's coming as a foreseeable event, but the atheologically messianic emerges only when "no anticipation sees it coming" (17). "Breaking with the present," explains Segal, "the secret (and with it the gift and literature) testifies to such a radical future, as do the groundless and ad infinitum hypotheses to which the secret gives rise about the literary text, hypotheses never to be verified or falsified in any present" (193). Segal turns to John Caputo to corroborate this interpretation of Derridean thinking. "The 'messianic secret' is, there is no secret and the Messiah is never going to show up," confirms Caputo: "Derrida's secret is not some hyperousiological high he has had and that he now whispers in our ear. Far from it. To be 'in on the secret' does not mean you know anything, that you are 'in the know'—but rather in the 'no,' *non-savoir*" (102).

49 The profound emanations of literature, which paradoxically lie on the surface of its texture, are depthless arrivals that gesture toward an unrealizable future. Baudelaire's

"La fausse monnaie," which overtly considers secrecy and voluntary donation, is therefore noticeably immanent, with the messianic, the ever-presently democratic, as a necessity of its own critical analysis. Sarty Snopes's untold journey, which projects beyond and therefore breaks through the frame of "Barn Burning," undoubtedly sounds a political note too. Fire speaks to Abner, according to the narrator, "as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing" (7–8). Abner may be an arsonist, but that insinuation does not damn him in everybody's judgment. "The burning of a barn by an impoverished cropper," as Godden maintains in William Faulkner (2007), "directs a quasi-political resentment against an institutional structure associated with a seemingly unchangeable form of labor exploitation." The poorest among Abner's coevals may regard his supposed actions as "a utopian hope," while his wealthier counterparts may "tacitly hypothesize a disguised crime" (15), but the result of such speculation is both an over- and undervaluation of the revolutionary potential unwittingly invested in some nonwarrantors by their warrantors. The hopes of the next generation of nonwarrantors, suggests "Barn Burning," are tied to the power of absolute secrecy to displace the authority of conditional secrets.

50 Thus, Faulkner's short story ends with the non-messianicism of a spectral man-child—whose delineation both invites and defies the demarcations of race and social status, allying him with the African-American cause by distancing himself from superordinate warranteeism—not coming toward but walking away from the reader under the "slow constellations" (25) an overarching sky. The economy of secrecy rather than race enables Faulkner to "map imbricated relations" between multifarious forms of otherness. The secrets of Colonel Sartoris Snopes, the inviolable and revealable secrets that authorize and censure a democracy to come, thereby propel this figure beyond the frame of this particular tale and toward an infinitely unrealizable hope, a future without horizon, as his non-reappearance in the Faulknerian canon silently implies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ambrose, Douglas. *Henry Hughes and Proslavery Thought in the Old South.* Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004. 259–422.

Baudelaire, Charles. "La fausse monnaie." *Petits poèmes en prose*. Ed. Melvin Zimmerman. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1968. 48–50.

Clausson, Nils. "Practicing Deconstruction, Again: Blindness, Insight and the Lovely Treachery of Words in D. H. Lawrence's 'The Blind Man.'" *College Literature* 34.1 (Winter 2007): 106–28.

Derrida, Jacques. "Before the Law." *Acts of Literature.* Ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1991. 181–220.

———. *Dissemination.* 1972. Trans. Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone, 2000.

———. "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone." *Religion: Cultural Memory in the Present*. Trans. Samuel Weber. Ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. 1–78.

———. "following theory / Jacques Derrida." *life.after.theory*. Ed. Michael Payne and John Schad. London: Continuum, 2003. 1–51.

———. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money.* Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

———. *On the Name*. Ed. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

———. "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. Ed. Simon Critchley. London: Routledge, 1996. 77–88.

———. *Writing and Difference*. 1967. London: Routledge, 2001.

Duvall, John N. "'A Strange Nigger': Faulkner and the Minstrel Performance of Whiteness." *The Faulkner Journal* 22.1/2 (Fall 2006/Spring 2007): 106–19.

Faulkner, William. "Barn Burning." *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 3–25.

Godden, Richard. *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

———. *William Faulkner: An Economy of Complex Words*. Princeton, MI: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Polk, Noel. *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1996.

Rapaport, Herman. *The Theory Mess: Deconstruction in Eclipse.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Segal, Alex. "Deconstruction, Radical Secrecy, andThe Secret Agent." *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.2 (Summer 2008): 189–208.

Shakespeare, William. *King Richard II*. Ed. Andrew Gurr. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Stein, Gertrude. "What is English Literature." *Lectures in America*. Introduction Wendy Steiner. London: Virago, 1988. 11–55.

NOTES

1. Segal—whose reading of Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent (1907) help to inspire the present essay, and also following Derrida's lead—comes to a similar conclusion with respect to Conrad's novel. "The title of the text—The Secret Agent—referring to something that breaks with law," reasons Segal, "is like the title of 'Counterfeit Money' as Derrida analyzes it, a title without title" (196).

2. Translations from "La fausse monnaie" are my own.
3. Mississippian sociologist Henry Hughes (1829–1862) uses the terms "warranteeism," "warrantor," "nonwarrantor," and "warrantee" in his Treatise on Sociology (1854). Although Hughes, as his biographer Douglas Ambrose explains, "did not represent a dominant tendency in antebellum southern thought" (7), his conclusions in this regard found pertinence following the war. White Americans should be superordinate warrantors, African Americans should be subordinate warrantees, thought Hughes, and the small percentage of white Americans with no property would be nonwarrantors.
4. If Abner has been simulating a limp, then he could play the role of African-American messenger as Duvall supposes.

ABSTRACTS

Working from Jacques Derrida's contentions about secrecy and authorial responsibility, and paying brief but specific attention to Charles Baudelaire's "La fausse monnaie" (1869), as suggested by Derridean concerns over capitalist economics, this article studies the manner in which the inviolable and conditional secrets of William Faulkner's "Barn Burning" (1938) reveal the poststructural tendencies *avant la lettre* of this leading American modernist. While Faulkner scholars have focused on the ambivalent language and metaphors deployed in this short story, they have not formerly traced the manner in which "Barn Burning" incites a sense of deconstructive criticism, and have thereby failed to acknowledge Faulkner's attendant authorial irresponsibility. This article redresses this critical imbalance.

INDEX

Keywords: deconstruction, inviolable (absolute) secrecy, Poststructuralism, revealable (conditional) secrecy

AUTHORS

MICHAEL WAINWRIGHT

Department of American and Canadian Studies, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom